

January 25, 2023

SB 2003

North Dakota Senate Appropriations Committee

Testimony from Amy Boyd, Anti-Trafficking Program Manager, Youthworks

Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Amy Boyd; I am the Anti-Trafficking Program Manager for Youthworks; a private, non-profit agency that serves youth, ages twelve to twenty-four. I have come before you today in support of SB 2003.

The funds that Youthworks receives from the Attorney General's budget are critical to ensuring that all of North Dakota's youth victims of human trafficking receive the care and support they deserve. As a non-profit, Youthworks leverages its Attorney General funds as "match" money for federal grants- essentially tripling the impact of state dollars. In simple terms, for every \$1 Youthworks receives in Attorney General funds, the agency receives an additional \$2 in federal funds. This ensures that victims have access to a comprehensive human trafficking service model, regardless of where they live, including in rural areas of the state. These funds support the anti-trafficking efforts of eight professionals across the state who provide support, therapy, mentorship, and shelter to youth victims of trafficking. Currently, Youthworks has anti-trafficking program personnel in Dickinson, Minot, Grand Forks, Bismarck and Fargo. One-quarter (25.8%) of the youth served in Youthworks anti-trafficking program live in our rural communities. During the 2019-2021 biennium, Youthworks provided 1,082 days of shelter (emergency and transitional) to 38 youth and young adults (0-24 years old). This project was

supported by Attorney General funding, as well as Youthworks' federal grants from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC). Thus far in the 2021-2023 biennium, Youthworks has provided 364 nights of emergency shelter to trafficked youth.

For the past eight years, I have worked directly with survivors of sexual exploitation and Human Trafficking and would like to tell you a little about them. Most of them were victimized when they were young. Most have been sexually abused, most have been physically abused, most struggle with feeling suicidal. Most of them have at some point either been given drugs or alcohol as a tool to manipulate them. Most of them have experienced food being withheld from them as a tool to control them. All of them have trauma, which affects their ability to make safe choices. All of them have a distorted view of their worth, seeing themselves only as an object of sexual pleasure. Because many of them have a history of abuse and neglect, they are especially vulnerable. We know that the trafficker selects them because of this vulnerability. Many of our youth have been trafficked by a parent or other relative. As you can imagine, the impact of this kind of trauma and betrayal is devastating.

The dollars that we have received from the Attorney General's budget has allowed us to walk alongside these youth as they start the journey of healing, and to support them as they cooperate with Law Enforcement investigations during their trafficker's prosecution. In the words of one of our staff, "Supported victims make good witnesses."

I'd like to tell you their stories, because they deserve to be heard; they deserve to have you be proud of them for what they've accomplished. I'd like to tell

you about *Jane, who was trafficked by her family and has experienced unimaginable trauma, and in spite of all of that is enrolled in school, goes to therapy, is an incredible artist, and when she's in our office, is an absolute ray of sunshine for everyone that she meets. Because of these funds, there are youth in our community like Jane who you would never know had been trafficked. They are productive members of our society and for some of them, are on the road to helping others that have experienced trafficking.

We are seeing the fruits of our dedication in this work, and to the well-being of trafficking survivors. Continued funding and support for the work we do is absolutely critical. We now have a coordinated system in place, with capable professionals who work together to prevent trafficking, support survivors, and assist Law Enforcement in bringing traffickers to justice. I ask today that you recommend a "do pass" on SB 2003 so we can continue the important work we're doing on behalf of extraordinarily vulnerable North Dakotans.